

to our national security interests. As a consequence, the bonds between our nations are extensive and deep. Hence our nation listened with great concern and sadness as we heard of the devastating earthquake on September 21st. The cost of this natural disaster is unimaginable, with millions of dollars in damage and over two thousand fatalities.

As this tragedy unfolded, our country immediately responded to assist in Taiwan's recovery. The United States government has mobilized search and rescue teams and emergency personnel to assist Taiwan in recovering and rehabilitation efforts. With this assistance, along with additional rescue teams from around the world, some of the pain of this crisis has been alleviated.

Certainly the road to recovery will neither be quick nor easy, however, I am confident that the resilience and strength of the Taiwanese people will allow them to overcome the challenges of reconstruction.

During Taiwan's National Day, I wish to offer my condolences to the Taiwanese government and all Taiwanese citizens. The United States stands ready to assist them during this difficult time.

COMMEMORATING NATIONAL
BIBLE WEEK, NOVEMBER 21-28, 1999

HON. LAMAR S. SMITH

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to serve as a Congressional Co-Chairman for this year's celebration of National Bible Week. During this week of Thanksgiving and prayer, it is fitting that we take time to recognize the importance and significance of the Holy Bible and encourage all walks of life to embrace the Bible in their daily lives. I also want to thank Mr. William E. Simon for serving as National Chairperson for the 1999 National Bible Week.

I commend the endeavors of the National Bible Association for setting aside this week to celebrate our common faith and to encourage others to read the Bible. It is in the Bible that we realize the wisdom of the Lord, and the true meaning of charity, love, and forgiveness. We must do more, through government and private action, to strengthen our families, care for our aging parents, and show hospitality to our neighbors. I am confident that in the Bible we, as a people and a world community, can find the answers to solving many of the problems we face in today's society.

I encourage all people, young and old, man and woman, rich and poor, sick and healthy to open up your lives to the teachings of the Holy Bible.

RESTORE BBA-97 MEDICARE FUNDING CUTS TO HOME HEALTH, HOSPITALS AND NURSING HOMES

HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the urgent matter of making restoration of Medicare funding to our home health agencies, hospitals and nursing homes, especially those that serve rural areas.

We are here to again bring to the attention of the House, and the American people, the absolute urgent need to take action before the end of this session of Congress—to restore Medicare funding and make other administrative adjustments to cutbacks imposed under the BBA of 1997.

The BBA-97, as it is called, proposed to cut \$115 billion from Medicare by either terminating or massively reducing Medicare reimbursement to providers of health and medical care for senior citizens and the disabled.

The effect has been that with only one-third of the mandated Medicare cuts having been implemented so far, the total cut is not \$115 billion—it already totals more than \$206 billion.

Imagine what will occur if the other two-thirds of proposed Medicare cuts are implemented in the coming year.

In West Virginia, the hardest hit segment of our health care delivery system has been among home health agencies. We have seen the closure of 18 of our home health agencies, and drastic reductions in staff and services at those still operating.

Our hospitals—especially the rural hospitals—are suffering the same kind of financial crush—with many of them having already drastically reduced staff, and dozens that have had to curtail services for outpatient care.

I just received word yesterday that the Appalachian Regional Hospital at Man, West Virginia, may be forced to close by the end of October—due in part to the loss of Medicare reimbursement. Another local hospital nearby which is in financial difficulty also, may eventually close. These are the only two hospitals serving a large rural county in my district. It is obvious that the closure of one hospital is bad enough—closure of two would create critical access problems for my constituents in need of emergency room care, inpatient care, and outpatient clinic services.

The same kind of burden has been placed upon nursing homes where the sickest, poorest and most vulnerable Medicare beneficiaries are cared for—and due to infirmities caused by age and disease—from heart problems to diabetes to stroke—they are the most costly of patients.

We have reached this impasse tonight because, in my view, Congress balanced our Nation's budget on the backs of its elderly, disabled, homebound citizens whose only help comes from Medicare.

It is my understanding—and if true I applaud him—that our colleague and friend, Representative BILL THOMAS, Chair of the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, will have introduced today—a plan to restore some of the BBA cuts to Medicare.

The first words that occurred to me when I heard about the Thomas plan was: It's about time.

But I genuinely applaud his effort because it is important to have our Health Subcommittee Chairman on record as having acknowledged the adverse impact of the Medicare cuts imposed on providers of this country's health care for our most needy, most vulnerable senior citizens.

It wasn't that long ago that we were constantly admonished not to pay any attention to our home health agencies about the Medicare cuts—even as they closed over 2,000 of them nationwide—18 of them in my State.

We were told that the cuts were not too deep, and that the impact was not so adverse as to require congressional action to restore them.

And so again I greet Chairman THOMAS' plan for restoring some of the BBA-97 Medicare cuts with genuine hope and lingering uncertainty, because we have not seen the details.

I am also gratified to hear—after preaching on the subject for two long years—that the Administration is looking into ways that Medicare reimbursement cuts can be restored through administrative action.

My colleagues here on the floor tonight will recall with me that we suggested this administrative action in a half-dozen letters to the Administration beginning over two years ago. But we were told that the BBA-97 was so tightly written that only legislative relief could help restore the Medicare cuts. We were told that the Administration had no "wiggle room" to act on its own.

Once the details of the Thomas plan are available to us for our study—we will know for sure whether he has sent the Fire Brigade to our rescue, or if we are being handed a pitcher of spit to try and extinguish the fires of neglect brought to our health care delivery system through the excessive Medicare cuts contained in the BBA of 1997.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I say only what many of us have been saying all along—that we must work together to get this burgeoning loss of health services under control.

Chairman THOMAS has taken a first step in leading Congress to act before the end of this year.

This is an important day—and I have every hope and expectation that Congress will move quickly and effectively to address the needs of our home health agencies, our hospitals, our nursing homes—providers who deserve our thanks and our support for this restoration of Medicare cuts imposed by BBA-97.

TRIBUTE TO DR. HECTOR O.
NEVAREZ

HON. SOLOMON P. ORTIZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 14, 1999

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to commend Mr. Hector Nevarez who recently retired from the Federal Government after 30 years of distinguished service. I would like to commend him for his patriotism in serving our nation.